

### UNDERSTANDING ISSUES IN THE NEWS

# Mosques: What's the Big Deal?

KEY  
STANDARD

**RH.6-8.1**

As you read in the article “Do We Look Like Terrorists to You?” (pp. 6-11), there are more than 2.2 billion Muslims worldwide. A Muslim’s house of worship is called a **mosque**. Read about mosques below, at left. Then answer the critical-thinking questions at right on a separate sheet of paper.

## Mosques at a Glance

**PURPOSE:** Mosques are where Muslims go to pray alone or as a community. The Arabic word for mosque is *masjid*, meaning a place of prostration (bowing in prayer).

**EXTERNAL ARCHITECTURE:** While mosques may vary, they often have a dome, which represents a vault to heaven, and a tower called a minaret, from which the call to prayer is made.

**PREVALENCE:** According to a study cited by the Pew Research Center, there were 1,209 mosques in the U.S. in 2000. By 2011, that number had grown to more than 2,000—meaning 4 in 10 mosques in the U.S. have opened since 2000. As a point of comparison, another study estimates that there were 334,000 Christian congregations in 2010. Additionally, Pew estimates that the proportion of Christians in the U.S. population declined 7.8 percentage points from 2007 to 2014.

**CONTROVERSY:** The presence of mosques in the U.S. has been increasingly under protest since 9/11. Some people say mosques are dangerous because they allow terrorists to gather or can even breed terrorism. Others say that attacks on mosques are examples of religious intolerance, and Muslims have the right to a place to worship.

## Questions

1. Using the JS article and the information at left, what inference can you draw about why the number of mosques in the U.S. is growing?
2. Based on your own knowledge and the information at left, describe one similarity and one difference between mosques and churches.
3. Why might the controversy over mosques have grown after the September 11, 2001, attacks?
4. Why are some people concerned about where Muslims worship? Why do you think this is such a heated issue?
5. Relate the controversy over mosques to our constitutional right to freedom of religion. Should there ever be limits to that freedom? Explain.

**RESEARCH EXTENSION:** The most notorious example of a U.S. mosque being protested is Park51, a place of worship planned for New York City, not far from where the World Trade Center stood. Research the controversy over that mosque and analyze the arguments on both sides. Do you think the opposition to the mosque was fair or was it based on religious intolerance? Explain.